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PCB damage being assessed

Public comment period has closed

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Poughkeepsie Journal

The deadline for the public to comment on the government's plan to assess and restore Hudson River natural resources damaged by PCB pollution has passed.

But the agency in charge of the study will continue to accept proposals for restoration projects that would compensate the public for any damages that could be documented.

"The door is always open for that," said Steven Sanford, chief of the Bureau of Habitat at the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

Three state and federal government agencies known as the Hudson River Trustees are studying a variety of potential damages — from the reproductive success of mink to recreational fishing — and will propose projects that compensate the public for any damages that can be documented scientifically. Projects could take many forms, from removing dams on tributaries to building fishing docks.

The trustees are the DEC, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Their studies are known as a Natural Resource Damage Assessment.

GE would have to pay

General Electric Co., which is cooperating in the \$500 million dredging project that will remove most lingering pollution north of Albany, is also liable for the cost of the studies and any restoration projects.

GE discharged upwards of 1 million pounds of polychlorinated biphenyls into the river for decades until the 1970s from capacitor manufacturing plants about 40 miles north of Albany. PCBs are thought likely to cause cancer and other health problems.

Sanford it could take until spring to read and respond to the relatively few comments received so far before the group's plan is finalized.

Some 300 potential re-

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Scenic Hudson
on PCBs

storation projects have been proposed, said Lisa Pelstring, spokeswoman for the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration.

GE planned to submit comments before the deadline, but declined to make them available to the Poughkeepsie Journal. Spokesman Mark Behan said GE hopes the trustees' studies are done "with the utmost integrity and fully in the public view."

"We want to work in a constructive way with the trustees and we expressed that in the comments, and we hope that this continues to be a transparent process so people can understand exactly what the trustees are doing," Behan said.

GE "wants information specific to the trustees' individual research projects to be made public, he said."

Scenic Hudson responds

Scenic Hudson, an environmental group based in Poughkeepsie, also submitted comments and made them available to the Poughkeepsie Journal.

Among the group's suggestions: study and compensate for the damage to commercial fishing on the Hudson, for ecological damage from the dredging itself, and even for Hudson River communities such as Poughkeepsie that may have paid to monitor drinking water for PCBs, even if none were discovered.

"The public's ability to fish, swim, boat and otherwise use and enjoy the Hudson River has been severely compromised by the release of GE's PCBs and the designation of 200 miles of the Hudson as federal toxic waste site since 1984," Scenic Hudson's comments read in part.

The damage assessment could take as long as 12 years by law, but trustees estimate studies will be complete in two to four years.